

# NEWS

## From Supervisor Bill Postmus First District, San Bernardino County



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### **POSTMUS: COUNTY FIRE DEPARTMENT RETURNING TO BAKER** *Supervisor Pledges Additional Coverage by Thanksgiving Holiday*

SAN BERNARDINO – Interstate motorists, starting with those driving in the upcoming holiday traffic season along Interstate 15, will now be considerably safer in case of automobile accidents, according to San Bernardino County First District Supervisor Bill Postmus.

“The County Fire Department will re-establish its presence in the community of Baker before the Thanksgiving holiday—traditionally the busiest getaway traffic day of the year,” Postmus said.

Toward that end, the Board of Supervisors today approved a supplemental agenda item directing county administrative staff to bring an operational plan and budget to the Board by December 10 to re-establish a County Fire operation at Baker. At the same time the Board approved an agreement with the Baker Correctional Facility to resume the provision of inmate firefighters to assist with emergency response services. These services will cost approximately \$6,000.

Fire protection for the desert community of Baker and the I-15 corridor from Basin Road to the Nevada state line had been provided by one County Fire employee who supervised a crew comprised of inmates from the Baker Correctional Facility. In early July when state budget cuts forced the closure of the correctional facility, the County Fire Department closed the Baker operation and began operating from its Harvard Station, located 42 miles south of Baker. The Harvard Station has been providing fire protection and emergency services along the traffic corridors of Interstate 15, Interstate 40, and Highway 127, resulting in delayed response times to medical emergencies and fires.

Postmus said that as the holiday season approaches the absence of reasonable

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## BAKER FIRE

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response capability to this area is of critical concern to area residents as well as to all who travel the County's freeway system to and from resort destinations in Nevada. The problem has generated statewide attention because of the heavy interstate traffic and high volume of accidents along the freeway in that area.

With the recent reactivation of the Baker Correctional Facility, County Fire personnel have begun training inmates to prepare them to resume fire and emergency service assistance at the level of Basic Firefighter I (180 hours). In addition to being certified in first-aid and CPR, inmates are learning how to deal with hazardous materials and learning fire suppression and rescue techniques. The inmate fire crews will be responding along with County paid-call firefighters from Baker by the first of December.

Before the Thanksgiving holiday, County Fire personnel will be available from Baker for immediate response to emergency calls during the course of inmate training. Postmus said he expects that after the Board takes action on an operational plan and budget on December 10, additional paid-call personnel will be stationed at Baker on an ongoing basis.

"While it's important that we re-activate the inmate firefighter program, we need to also recognize that this source of manpower may very easily disappear next year, or the next year, because we will be seeing state budget cuts for the foreseeable future," Postmus said.

The Supervisor added that he will continue to work closely with fire officials to search for opportunities to improve fire protection for this area. He said he would continue to press for federal and state assistance to build a fire station at Baker and to provide equipment and training for rescue and hazardous materials response.

"Unfortunately, federal and state assistance for this serious interstate problem has not yet been forthcoming," Postmus said. "But the safety of travelers through my District and our County is a concern that can't wait to be addressed. The public's safety demands that we commit these interim resources to help save lives in our County."